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ABSTRACT

The life and work of Alfred Adler is outlined with a listing and explanation of the five principles of his Individual Psychology: (1) social interest, (2) self-determinism, (3) goal directed behavior, (4) subjectively interpreted perception, and (5) holism. The Adlerian terms, life style and family constellation are likewise explained. There is also a discussion of the application of Adlerian principles in the classroom and in the family education centers being developed in Canada. (MJ)

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Paper presented at the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association Convention

Toronto, May 31, 1971

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Alan M. Dunn C.G.C.A. Convention, 1971

When Abraham Maslow used the term "Third Force Psychology" to describe what he stood for, he was alluding to a schism which has divided behavioral scientists for two generations. The first force is, of course, dominated by Freud and his constructs of the id, the ego, and the superego, his emphasis on biological drives, especially sex, and his technique of psychoanalysis in which the patient is probed at depth in an effort to find or prove the subconscious motivation underlying the pathology.

And the second force, stemming from the experimental psychology of the American behaviorists, is behaviorism. I suppose the father figure is J. B. Watson, but of course the current leader is B. F. Skinner whose brilliant work has led to such applications as teaching machines, programmed learning, and behaviour modification. John Krumboltz bases his behavioral counselling on the same theory.

Well, as we know, these two forces haven't really had much to say to one another. The Freudians have sought a theory of personality to serve as an explanation for and subsequent treatment of neurotic and psychotic conditions. These people were doctors, not psychologists, and they needed a medical model of pathology. It didn't have to stand up to rigid scientific proof so long as it helped them in their work. The behaviorists, on the other hand, have been experimental psychologists building a scientific psychology with the methods and outlook of the physical sciences, and have therefore shunned analogies and philosophical speculations in favour of such phenomena as stimulus and response which can supposedly be studied in the laboratory with the same scientific rigour as phenomena from the

physical sciences. From this emerged an explanation of behaviour which allowed nothing to mediate between the S and the R. The behaviorists' model of behaviour saw man as much at the mercy of his environment as the Freudian model saw him at the mercy of inner forces.

Maslow's Third Force is the new humanistic approach to the psychology of human behaviour which, in a sense, rejects both the inner determinism of the Freudians and the environmental determinism of the behaviorists and suggests instead a new, more humane psychology which puts the self-determination of the individual at the centre. It took the genius of Maslow to persuade American psychologists to accept this position. As a result the new humanism not only gives personality theory acceptance and respectability among orthodox psychologists, but it goes farther and suggests that man is really free to choose his own goals and to develop his own unique potential. But this view was not really new, and Maslow was ready to admit that it did not originate with him. It goes back, in fact, to the work of several social psychological theorists, the earliest and best known of which was Alfred Adler. Upon the occasion of the celebration of Adler's centennial in 1970, Dr. Maslow wrote, "For me, Alfred Adler becomes more and more correct year by year. As the facts come in they give stronger and stronger support to his image of Man." Adler is indeed the basic theorist, the father figure, if you like, of the whole humanistic movement, and his influence on counselling and therapy, as well as on personality theory, has been far wider than is commonly known.

Born in Vienna in 1870, Adler grew up to become an able physician. From general practice he soon found himself drawn into

the study of neurotic and psychotic behaviour, and it was here he met and associated with Freud who was his elder by 14 years. Contrary to what one often reads, he was never a student or close collaborator of Freud: in fact, he broke away from the Psychoanalytic Association fairly early to pursue his own opposing ideas, and in so doing earned the undying enmity and opposition of his older and more famous associate.

After World War I Adler's optimistic views on human potential and his thoughts on child training came to the attention of the Social Democratic Government, and he was commissioned to set up what he called Child Guidance Centres and later School Counselling Centres in over thirty of the state schools in Vienna. In these centres he taught teachers, doctors, nurses, and parents how to understand the behaviour of children and how to work with them in the discussion and resolution of their problems. At the same time Adler lectured at the Vienna State Institute of Education. This is the first time on record that a psychiatrist turned his full attention to guidance and counselling in the school situation. This fact is very little known, and I have never seen it referred to in any history of guidance. What is even less known is that Adler's rationale and methods were so advanced that they provide a model for developmental guidance which few schools can match even today. It was all swept away with the collapse of the Social Democrats and the advent of the Nazis, but by good fortune one of the teachers Adler trained in his methods, Oscar Spiel, wrote an account of the program in his school and called it "Discipline Without Punishment - An Account of a School in Action." The book is now in English translation and is readily available.

It was in this same period, up to about 1931, that Adler gradually evolved his theory and practice to which he had earlier given the name "Individual Psychology." In this period too, his fame and reputation spread throughout Europe, Britain, and America. With the collapse of Austria imminent, he felt obliged to look abroad. He established connections in New York, and finally moved there permanently in 1935, leaving behind most of what he possessed.

In America, though no longer young, he quickly became fluent and forceful in English. He built up a practice, was appointed to the chair of psychiatry in a small medical college, and began once again to lecture and travel. His arrival in America had been preceded by that of his old arch-rival and enemy, Freud, and Psychoanalysis was already on its way to winning a near monopoly in medical psychiatry. Before Adler had a chance to make his presence really felt, he died suddenly while on a lecture tour in Britain. This was in 1937, and, as the world moved into World War II a few years later, it looked as if Alfred Adler and Individual Psychology might be forgotten.

Well, far from being forgotten, the post-war world gradually came to realize how far ahead of his time Adler had been, and the expansion of interest has been phenomenal. In this modern period the best known and most influential Adlerian has been Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, former Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Chicago. Most of us who are keen on Individual Psychology learned about it first from Dr. Dreikurs through his books, his lectures, and his demonstrations. I must personally too give recognition to Professor Heinz L. Ansbacher, Professor of Psychology at the University of Vermont. Dr. Ansbacher is the leading Adlerian historian and scholar, and I recommend his writings to the serious students among you.

To introduce you to the content of Individual Psychology I have selected five principles only to comment upon.

1. The most distinctive concept of the five, and also the most difficult to grasp, is that of social interest. In each person from birth is an innate urge to move towards the group, from an inferior to a superior position, to become a person, to have worth, and to earn respect. While instinctual, social interest has to be developed and nurtured from earliest childhood, as otherwise the child may become spoiled or discouraged and turn to the useless side of behaviour. The person possessed of highly developed social interest is actively interested in the interests of others, and, as with Maslow's self-actualizing person, functions on the level of growth motivation. Adler associated high social interest with nearly all desirable traits and low social interest with nearly all undesirable traits, and it is his criterion of mental health.

2. Secondly we have the idea of self-determinism which I mentioned earlier as central to the humanistic or third force movement. While we have to accept both our heredity and our environment, we are free to choose how we respond to these circumstances, and it is this response that is significant. Essentially man acts; he does not just react; he is free to be himself, and he is able to assume the responsibility for his decisions. Man is indeterminate, capable of infinite development, not limited by a fixed intelligence or any notion of predetermined development.

3. Thirdly comes the thought that behaviour is goal directed, purposive, though the real purpose may not be apparent to the behaver. The Adlerian psychologist sees behaviour as action in pursuit of self-chosen goals, rather than reaction to some drive or stimulus from within or without. This is a very fundamental point, and is known as the teleological principle.

4. A fourth point is that perception is subjectively interpreted, that reality is in the eye of the beholder, or that the individual is only to be really understood in terms of his phenomenological field. It is not what has happened to the child that matters, but rather how the child has viewed what has happened; therefore, to work effectively as a teacher or counsellor, one must be cognizant of this subjective view, the child's "private logic." Thus, for example, apparent under-achievement in school is to be understood more in terms of the student's subjective interpretations than in terms of standardized test results. Or consider the little boy who has no father and who lives alone with a working mother. He is not by some general law to be called a disadvantaged child. Though he may well be disadvantaged, he may also interpret his situation with courage and use it to develop into a highly responsible, self-determining young person.

5. The fifth principle is that of holism, which suggests the indivisible nature of personality -- that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The fragmentation of behaviour for study purposes is not only unnecessary but misleading. Behaviour is only to be understood through the study of the person's movement in his social context, and as a unified psychobiological organism. Inter-personal factors are likely to help us more than intra-personal ones. Nomothetic data such as "objective" test scores may be of some help, but may well be irrelevant, and, if used out of context, even mis-leading. In referring to Adler's concept of holism, Maslow commented: "I should say that in one respect especially the times have not yet caught up with him. I refer to his holistic emphasis. This is certainly a task for the seventies."

Before moving on I should mention two Adlerian terms. The first is "life style," which refers to the idiosyncratic way in which a young child learns to interpret and evaluate experiences while still in the pre-school period. Part of this is the child's evaluation of himself, which we hear so much of these days under the term "self-concept." The life style may well reflect many biased apperceptions because youngsters are good observers but poor interpreters; nevertheless, the life style has remarkable resistance to change. While this gives consistency and predictability to the personality, it renders more difficult the task of effecting any fundamental change.

And the other term I want to mention is "family constellation," used with reference to the dynamic balance of inter-personal forces within the family. Each child strives to establish his place in the group, and in a competitive society is likely to meet sharp challenges from his siblings. Competition is especially common between the first and second child, and this leads to opposite character traits, abilities, interests, and temperaments as the one finds his successes in areas not already dominated by the other. How often have we marvelled at how different the second child is from the first! Traditional psychology has explained this in terms of heredity, whereas Individual Psychology sees it as the result of social movement. The study of the family constellation is absolutely vital in understanding the life styles of the children.

I have mentioned five principles underlying Individual Psychology, and mentioned the concepts of life style and family constellation. If you are in touch with the various current approaches to humanistic counselling and therapy none of these points will be

entirely foreign to you, and you will even be tempted to say that you already subscribe to some, perhaps all of them, and allow them to influence your work. Well, to some degree this is certainly the case; I have a good notion, however, that, while counsellors and psychologists subscribe intellectually to all or some of these principles, they fall pretty short of applying them; that is, they have not really internalized them philosophically or operationally. I am convinced that this is the case, as otherwise they could not condone many of the practices and presumptions still found very commonly in our classrooms and in their own work. Dr. Dreikurs makes a strong point here when he warns Adlerian counsellors about the danger of eclecticism. Individual psychology has, as it were, a holism of its own. It's not just something to nibble at whenever you feel it may serve your purpose.

Well, now, what does all this really offer us as professionals who sincerely wish to raise the level of education and the quality of family and community life? I see it offering us many things if we can find the courage to act. First of all it offers to the teacher in the classroom a model for understanding the behaviour and development of children which will be of practical use to her every day. The teacher who is well grounded in Adlerian principles will run a democratic classroom, will know how to encourage children, will be able to cope with most of her classroom problems, and will be able to help parents with their part of the job. The typical teacher today simply has not been taught how to do these things. When faced with problems of misbehaviour and discouragement, she either becomes dictatorial and autocratic or she refers to the school counsellor or psychologist. If she becomes dictatorial, she only compounds the problem; and if she refers the problem to the supposed experts, she loses face and

is likely to end up no wiser than she was to begin with because the experts really don't know how to help the child any more than she does. In a school committed to developmental guidance on the Adlerian model, the counsellor's main task will be to serve as a consultant to teachers, helping them to be better teachers.

I suggested that the teacher or counsellor with good Adlerian training is in a position to lead parent discussion groups on the principles of child raising and democratic family living. Several teachers in Metro Toronto, including myself, have done this over the past few years, and the results have been exciting indeed. If any of you are interested in the procedures and materials used, I would be happy to communicate with you.

One of Dr. Dreikurs' great achievements has been the development of family education centres, open forums where families may go to be helped with their family problems. Dr. Dreikurs has demonstrated the technique of family counselling many times in Canada, and Dr. Pew, the Past President of the American Association of Adlerian Psychology, has done the same. In Toronto the Toronto Association of Individual Psychology, with nearly 200 members, is moving towards the setting up of its own family education centre. Last winter we ran a series of practicum sessions to train our own counsellors in these methods, and the prospect is that we shall have a small centre in operation this fall.

Adlerian psychology, the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler, is only now becoming well known in Canada. As teachers and counsellors discover its relevancy to the current scene, as they internalize its mood of optimism, co-operation, and mutual helpfulness, and as they realize its potential for improving human relations in the family and the community as well as in the school and the classroom, they will turn to it with more and more enthusiasm.

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